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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MONROVIA 000091

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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KCRM](#) [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [LI](#)
SUBJECT: LIBERIA: EFFORTS TO COMBAT WEST AFRICAN DRUG
TRAFFICKING

REF: 07 STATE 165562

Classified By: Ambassador Donald E. Booth for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (U) SUMMARY: The Government of Liberia (GOL) does not currently have the will or resources to fight drug-trafficking. Liberia is not presently a major transshipment point for cocaine bound for Europe, but is likely to become so as infrastructure improves and UNMIL draws down. A small number of government officials recognize the likelihood of future problems and have begun to work towards tougher narcotics laws in the country. Liberian Drug Enforcement Agency has received no bilateral support and minimal international support from the United Nations. The Liberian Drug Enforcement Agency (LDEA) will likely be absorbed into the Liberia National Police (LNP) as part of a larger national security strategy. Training and rehabilitation resources are at the top of the LDEA's wish list.

NARCOTICS TRENDS

[¶2.](#) (U) Currently, Liberia experiences low-grade, regional trafficking for internal consumption. Nigerians are suspected of bringing in the majority of cocaine and some marijuana. Most is brought overland on trucks across Liberia's porous borders. (Note: According to a press account, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Director for Anti-Child Trafficking Col. Anthony Bonar said that only 30 of 146 border posts are regularly manned. End Note.) There have also been some reports of vessels docking at small ports in Sinoe, Grand Kru, and River Cess Counties. Cannabis is grown primarily in Bong County, but crops can be found throughout Liberia.

[¶3.](#) (C) The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) has received reporting that some United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) officials, especially members of the Nigerian contingent and Ukrainian contractors operating UNMIL airlift, are complicit in the drug trade, facilitating trafficking by sea and air. DEA has also received information that Colombian drug cartels have approached GOL officials in an effort to receive protection for trafficking networks in Liberia.

[¶4.](#) (U) Local consumption largely takes the form of crack and marijuana. The LDEA assesses that many consumers are ex-combatants, both new users as well as those still addicted from drug use during the war who never had access to rehabilitation clinics or therapy. They also connect these users with violent crime in Liberia. According to the LDEA, intravenous drug use is on the rise in Liberia.

[¶5.](#) (U) In her Annual Message to the Legislature January 28,

President Sirleaf said that the LDEA arrested 179 drug offenders in 2007, a 44% increase over the previous year, noting that many of those arrested were foreigners. However, of the 179 arrested, only nine were convicted. She called for a more effective response to the growing drug menace, and greater patrol by the LNP, Customs and Immigration. She said that the LDEA destroyed "huge quantities" of marijuana, cocaine and heroin. (Note: In recent months the GOL has made some highly publicized seizures of large quantities of cannabis. However, according to the LDEA, 1,405 grams of cocaine and only 16.2 grams of heroin were seized and destroyed in 2007. There were no reported seizures of amphetamines. End Note.)

LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS AND CAPABILITIES

¶16. (U) The LDEA currently has 70 officers spread through seven counties. They plan to deploy officers to the remaining eight counties this year. There are officers posted at some border crossing points. They plan to assign one officer to Roberts International Airport (RIA) and the Freeport of Monrovia. There are already officers posted at the Port of Buchanan. LDEA has invited UNMIL to assist in counternarcotics efforts, but UNMIL has thus far not participated. The LDEA performs raids throughout the country, based on tips and information collected by their intelligence team. LDEA routinely performs burn exercises to dispose of confiscated drugs.

¶17. (U) The LNP has a drug unit, though it operates primarily, and sporadically, in Monrovia. The LNP and LDEA do not coordinate or deconflict operations within Monrovia, though there has been some deconfliction of operations in leeward

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counties. There have been accusations of corruption within all levels of the LNP, to include LNP protection of drug traffickers. LDEA has allegedly arrested LNP officers for drug trafficking. The LNP drug unit was specifically targeted as it has never performed a burn exercise, prompting the question as to where seized drugs have gone.

¶18. (U) The LDEA does posses and has been trained on drug testing kits. It is unclear how often they use them.

NATIONAL STRATEGY

¶19. (C) Despite the lack of GOL capacity there does not appear to be a large-scale trafficking problem in Liberia at present. This is attributed primarily to the fact that the infrastructure in Liberia is too poor for large scale operations. The inefficiencies and high expense at the port in Monrovia have made the transshipment of any goods cumbersome. RIA has few international flights (however, the number is growing -- Kenya began flying from Nairobi via Accra in April 2007 and Royal Air Maroc began flying from Casablanca in December 2007), and roads are hazardous. Also, despite the low priority UNMIL has placed on counternarcotics, the mere presence of about 15,000 UNMIL troops (and the fact that UNMIL controls all the airports) is dissuasive. However, continued infrastructure development and the drawdown of UNMIL, as well as the crackdown on drug trafficking in nearby countries, will likely make Liberia a more attractive transit point in the future.

¶10. (U) Liberia does not have a clear national counternarcotics strategy to deal with this looming threat. Liberia does not have any narcotics laws. The LDEA currently operates under a public health law, and all offences are bailable, meaning suspects arrested for drug crimes merely have to pay a fine in order to be released. LDEA recently drafted an anti-trafficking law, which incorporates money-laundering, asset freeze and confiscation regulations. The anti-trafficking law is with the Minister of Justice for

review before going to the legislature for passage.

¶11. (C) GOL discussions regarding a Liberian National Security Strategy bogged down in December over a disagreement between the Security Pillar and the Governance Commission (GC) on consolidation of the intelligence and law enforcement agencies, with the Pillar recommending that the LDEA be dissolved into the LNP, and the GC arguing for separate authorities as checks and balances. (Note: the Security Pillar, chaired at the ministerial level and comprising GOL officials and international partners, is one of four pillars of the Liberia Reconstruction and Development Commission. The GC is charged with promoting governance reform principles. End Note.) The two bodies agreed to send separate drafts to the President. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Justice, with USG assistance, has completed a draft "Liberian National Security and Intelligence Act" that would subsume the LDEA into the LNP. President Sirleaf has not yet approved either a National Security Strategy nor a draft National Security and Intelligence Act, but has indicated she would like to move ahead with submitting the draft Act to the legislature soon.

¶12. (U) LDEA has no relationship with regional counterparts and there is no information sharing.

¶13. (U) There are no national anti-drug campaigns. LDEA occasionally has spots on radio talk shows to serve this purpose.

BILATERAL/INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

¶14. (U) The GOL receives no bilateral support for counternarcotics efforts. UNMIL's International Police contingent ran a workshop for LDEA on drug identification in ¶2006. In 2005 and 2006 the UN/Office on Drugs and Crime sponsored four LDEA officers to attend training in Nigeria. They did not receive an invitation in 2007. The UN is renovating an LDEA office in Bong County.

¶15. (U) LDEA will be sending an officer to Dakar, Senegal for an upcoming regional conference on cocaine trafficking in West Africa. They also received an invitation for a conference in Vienna, Austria for an HIV-Drug conference.

LIBERIAN WISH-LIST

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¶16. (U) The Director of the Liberian DEA told PolOff that all assistance would be helpful, specifically logistics in the form of vehicles and motorbikes, test kits, and training for officers. Additionally, he emphasized the need for rehabilitation services in the country. Despite the media coverage of child soldiers and combatants using the cocaine/gunpowder mix there was never a concerted effort to send the adult ex-combatants through rehabilitation during the disarmament period.

Booth